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## A First Timer's Guide to the ACL Conference

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# A First Timer's Guide to the ACL Conference



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## **ABSTRACT**

This article provides planning tips, packing suggestions, and post-conference recommendations for people who may be attending the ACL conference for the first time. It also offers advice on what to do while at the conference.

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I attended my first ACL conference in June 2015. It was a wonderful event and I learned a lot from it. Based on my experience, I came up with the following tips and observations that I thought other first timers might appreciate.

## **Before the Conference**

There will be a listserv specifically for conference attendees. You are automatically added to it once you register for the conference. Pay attention to that once it is created as a lot of useful information is shared on it.

Do not worry about how you are going to get from the airport to the conference site. There will be a shared document and people will post their name, airline, flight number, and arrival time. Once that list becomes available, just find someone who is arriving at the same time, or close to it, as you are. Sharing a taxi is a great way to meet people and remember, meeting people is just a friendlier way of saying networking.

If you can, arrive early or stay late. There is usually a lot to do in the area and you should take advantage of that if budget allows. ACL does not sponsor these trips so if you prefer to plan, organize the trip yourself. If you do not want to be the organizer you can always post your interest to the conference listserv and see if anyone else wants to go with you. Day trips are a great way to meet people.

## **Packing**

Stay on campus. It is less expensive and much more fun.

If you are staying on campus, remember that it is not a hotel and therefore does not have the same amenities. You should bring shampoo and conditioner.

You might want to bring your own hangers and blow dryer.

You might not be able to control the temperature in your room. If you are a person who gets cold easily, bring layers to sleep in.

The bathroom might be shared with others on your floor. Bring shower shoes, a bathrobe, and something in which to carry your toiletries.

Librarians can be a rowdy bunch. If you do not want to perpetuate stereotypes, bring earplugs.

The Farewell Banquet does not have a dress code (indeed the conference itself does not have an official dress code) but most people wear nice church clothes.

Wondering what to wear to the workshops? Many people wear business casual, although some wear more casual and less business. Every year there is an unofficial dress code sent out in advance of the conference. It is well represented by attendees and can be a fun way to bond with your fellow librarians.

Wear comfortable shoes. There is a lot of walking involved in attending a conference. You do not know the state of the sidewalks or if the campus has many hills. Think twice about planning on wearing dress shoes every day, even if you do that normally.

Bring a sweater. College classrooms tend toward the cool side to keep people awake.

If you like board games you may want to bring one with you. There is always a board game night and diversity in game options can be welcomed. If you are worried about bringing a game that other people are already bringing, post it on the conference listserv.

Always carry cash or a card with you. You never know when someone is going to say, "Let's go get ice cream!"

A small flashlight for your room can be helpful for that time after you turn off the light and before you get into bed.

Post-It notes can be helpful for your door to let people know where you are. This is especially useful at night when there are so many social events going on.

Remember to bring your phone charger and the charger for your tablet/laptop. If you are flying, do not pack these in your checked baggage, but keep them handy in your carry-on.

If you feel the need to have your phone, your tablet, your conference notebook, a regular notebook, a water bottle, and other items with you during the conference, I recommend bringing a backpack that has good support, preferably one with the clip across your chest. You might have a nice looking messenger bag that you would prefer to bring. I learned this year that those get heavy after walking around campus all day. Stick with the backpack.

The workshop schedule is released in advance. You might want to look at this and decide what workshops you want to attend and when and where they are. However, be open to change as well. You might discover an interest that you did not know you had and there could be a workshop on it. If other librarians from your school are attending the conference, you might want to divide the workshops so that you are covering more topics and not all sitting together in the same workshop all the time.

## **During the Conference**

Get on Twitter and follow the conference hashtag. This is a great way to see who is doing what at the conference. It is also a great way to meet people. You can start following them on Twitter, build that virtual relationship first, before you find them in real life, and put a voice with a name.

Do not know anyone at the conference? Go to events and talk to people. There are no strangers in ACL. Do not know how to start a conversation with someone you do not know? Ask what they do at their library. On the other hand, what their favorite book is. How did they get to the conference? Who is their favorite superhero? You can even make it a game: eat with someone different at every meal or talk to five new people each day. After you finish your conversation, or at the end of each day, jot down a few notes: their name, library, and gist of the conversation; this will help you later on.

Breaks include food. You will not go hungry at this conference!

Do not just sit in your room. If you have time between activities go sit in the library. There is always someone in the library.

Nametags are provided. Wear your nametag to meetings and social events. Carry business cards with you. If you want to have quick access to them, you can even tuck them in the sleeve that holds your nametag.

Campus maps will be provided. You might want to look at them in advance and compare them with the conference schedule. Identify where each of the buildings that you will be using is located. Is there a monument or statue on campus that is particularly well known? Locate it on the campus map and be sure to visit it while you are at the conference.

Attend the interest groups sections. This is a great way to get involved and to meet people with a similar interest in a specific area of librarianship as you. There are interest groups for solo librarians, liberal arts colleges, Bible colleges, information literacy, interlibrary loan, and more.

## **After the Conference**

When you get back to your library, type up a list of all the great ideas that you got at the conference. This will help you see what you learned and remind you to implement it.

Remember the notes that you took about people you had conversations with? This is where it becomes helpful. Stay in touch with those people. Send them a quick email saying that it was great meeting them at the conference and reference something that you spoke about in your conversation. If you promised to send them a link or an article, do it now while it is fresh in your mind.

Email them again a few months down the road. Just check in with them and see how it is going. You could even ask if they are planning on going to the conference next year. Maybe they will want to do a day trip with you. Do not think that you will be able to remember to do that? Schedule it on your calendar now.

And remember, while you are at the conference, have fun! Yes, it is a conference and we are here for professional development reasons. However, we are also here to see friends that are flung across the country, to find out what is going on at other libraries, to be a part of that faith-based support group that knows exactly what you are going through because they have been there too. The ACL conference will create memories and friendships that will last a lifetime.

Still have questions? Ask a librarian. ✚

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